

September 24, 1968

Dr. Stanley Yolles
National Institute of Mental Health
5454 Wisconsin Avenue
Chevy Chase, Maryland

Dear Stan:

I am very much heartened by the action that the council did finally adopt with respect to amplifying the information given to applicants. I feel even more strongly that we have to proceed definitely but cautiously to be sure that we end up with a workable and useful policy.

One of the commentators attempted to draw an analogy between the secret deliberations of a trial jury of "peers" and the actions of a study section. I hope I was able to give adequate emphasis to the vital distinction, mainly that the jury can only weigh testimony which is given according to very carefully drawn rules of evidence that do provide for cross-examination and rebuttal.

I should have introduced a much more obvious analogy and one that may be a reasonable base on which to work for the development of the grants policy, namely the generally adopted system of review of papers for publication in a journal. Even this system has sometimes been attacked as being too secret, but it is certainly far more open and gives more information to disappointed authors than the present system now gives to disappointed grant applicants. On the whole, there probably is the right spread of policies among different journals and a reasonably appropriate central trend towards protecting the anonymity of the more queasy reviewers, though sometimes even allowing their names to be presented to authors, and yet giving the author the fullest possible information of the grounds on which a journal has acted in accepting or rejecting his contribution. I would also stress the very flexible techniques that have been developed to allow an author to have his paper conditionally accepted and to permit him with the least loss of time to make essential corrections that may be clearly required for the paper to be a contribution worth reading. There may be even some literature and certainly considerable experience in the collective history of editorial function that might be worthwhile to look at, at least briefly, in considering policies in respect to grants.

Sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL:lh

Mailed 10-8-68

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